

Remarks:

Reconsideration of this application in view of the above-identified amendments and following remarks is respectfully requested. Claims 15-18, 23-25, and 28 are currently pending. Claims 1-14, 19, 20-22, 26, 27 and 29 have been cancelled. Claims 15-18, 23-25 and 28 stand rejected for the reasons of record. Claims 15 has been currently amended to further patentably distinguish the present invention over the prior art. No new matter has been added. For purposes of clarity, Applicant addresses each of the Examiner's concerns in the order set forth in the previous Office Action.

Claims 15-18, 24, 25, and 28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious in view of Kumar et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,684,055) in combination with Grancio et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,386,188) and Rubens et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,684,055) and Johnson et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,424,287) for the reasons of record. Claim 23 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious in view of Kumar et al. in combination with Grancio et al. and Rubens et al. and Johnson et al., as well as Kumar (U.S. Patent No. 5,223,545) for the reasons of record.

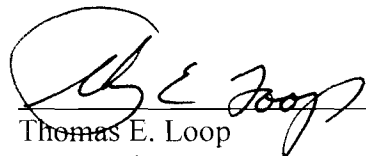
Applicant respectfully disagrees with the Examiner's conclusions relating to obviousness. However, and for purposes of expediting allowance of the present application, Applicant has further narrowed the scope of the presently claimed invention such that the claimed method now recites that the step of at least partially foaming the plasticized thermoplastic material occurs "at a temperature less than the melt temperature of the thermoplastic material." Support for these new claim limitations may be found, for example, in claim 3 of the Specification (which reads, "foaming the exposed article at a temperature below the melt temperature of the polymeric material."). Applicant respectfully submits that these further narrowing amendments patentably distinguishes the present invention over the teachings of the prior art, especially the teachings of the methods of Johnson et al. (wherein polymer extrudate is always foamed at a temperature greater than the polymer's melt temperature). In addition, Applicant further notes that none of the prior art references of record, either alone or in combination, teach or suggest a step of additional heating to thereby increase the crystallinity level of the shaped article of manufacture (as is required according to dependent claim 28).

In view of the above remarks and claim amendment allowance of claims 15-18, 23-25 and 28 is earnestly solicited. A good faith effort has been made to place this application in

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condition for allowance. If any further matter requires attention prior to allowance, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned attorney at (206) 568-3100 to resolve the same.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas E. Loop
Registration No. 42,810
(206) 568-3100